

The weekly briefing | 16 June 2014

Political and security risk updates

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Africa

United States condemns Sudanese government attacks on civilians

On 12 June, the United States condemned attacks by the Sudanese government's forces on civilians in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states that deliberately targeted schools and hospitals. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, gave a statement three days after a coalition of 45 humanitarian aid organisations wrote to the UN Security Council (UNSC), African Union (AU) and Arab League (AL) demanding an end to civilian targeting.

In particular, Power criticised attacks by the Sudanese government's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), stating that surface and air attacks have increased since April, and have included the use of barrel bombs. Government forces fighting rebels from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) have pressed ahead with the summer offensive aimed at ending the armed rebellion. Increasing violence has affected around 1.2 million people, causing widespread displacement, and limiting the access of aid organisation to rebel held areas of the country. The coalition of aid groups called upon the UNSC, AU and AL to press for an end to Sudan's current military offensive and to launch an independent investigation into alleged human rights violations by Sudanese armed forces.



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The short-run relief of this suffering will depend upon the ability of the international community to exert political pressure upon the Sudanese government in order to facilitate the flow of aid to affected regions. Despite this possibility, reports of looting and the destruction of food and water supplies suggest that continued military operations are likely to generate a deficit in basic infrastructure, worsening the humanitarian suffering in rebel held areas in the long run. The Sudanese government will be under particular duress to maintain tighter control of its armed forces, and to demonstrate to the international community that any continued military operations are in compliance with international law and humanitarian norms.

Other developments

On 13 June, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon warned that attacks against international and Malian troops by insurgent groups in Mali are increasing and posing a greater threat to civilians. His report to the UN Security Council on the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) called for peacekeepers to counter the threat from remote areas by expanding further into the country's volatile north. Currently, the UN operation is only at three quarters of its mandated strength of 11,200 troops and 1,440 police officers, and lacks the air cover and operational mobility necessary to expand beyond main population centres. On 11 June, four UN peacekeepers were killed and others wounded in a suicide attack on their base in Aguelhok, northern Mali, as political negotiations with rebel groups continue to stall.

A bombing on Tanzania's Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar killed one and injured several others on 13 June. The bomb exploded near a mosque in the Darajani business district of Stone Town on the semi-autonomous archipelago at approximately 17:15 UTC. Zanzibar is currently hosting a religious gathering of Muslims from across East Africa. Attacks targeting Christian leaders and churches in recent years have significantly impacted the island's tourism industry. Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete has warned that religious tensions are threatening peace in the country, where many Muslims along the coast are feeling marginalised by the secular government.

The West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) called for minor drug offences to be decriminalised.

The regional commission published a report on 12 June listing drug production, consumption and trafficking as causing a public health crisis in the region and hindering development goals. The report claims that current policies are fuelling illicit trade and corruption, adding to instability in countries such as Guinea-Bissau. Former Nigerian president and chairman of the commission, Olusegun Obasanjo, warned of West Africa's recent transformation from being a transit zone for drugs to being a significant zone of consumption itself, citing the lack of available treatment for addicts and the spread of disease as major corresponding risks.

On the radar

- **The South Sudanese government and rebel leaders are expected to form a unity government** following the agreement of a 60-day ultimatum on 10 June.
- **The Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD) to stage a number of anti-government rallies across Kenya** up until 7 July.
- **Protests are set to continue in South Africa** over the lack of access to adequate sanitation in the country's poorest areas.

Americas

World Cup 2014 commences in Brazil with no major reported incidents despite numerous protests

On 12 June, the opening ceremony of the World Cup 2014 was staged in the Corinthians Arena in São Paulo, Brazil. In the run-up to the event, many feared that the festivities would be marred by a wave of protests and public transport strikes. A series of marches were organised in most of the 12 host cities of the World Cup, including a pacifist rally in Rio de Janeiro and a 24-hour strike in the city's airport; however, only minor incidents were reported. The FIFA World Cup in Brazil is set to be the most expensive World Cup to date, with estimated costs tripling between 2007 and 2014 to approximately \$11 billion. As such, large sections of the Brazilian population believe that the money spent in the organisation of the tournament has been detrimental to the improvement of public services, such as education and healthcare. In addition, a number of worker unions and other social movements have sought to use the World Cup's media coverage to promote their own agendas.

The fate of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff is contingent on the successful management of the World Cup. She will stand for re-election in October amid a sharp decrease in her support base after the 2013 summer protests against rising living costs. The latest poll on voting intentions showed that support for the president had slipped to 38% in June from 40% in May. The same poll showed her main political rival, Aécio Neves, has experienced an increase from 20% to 23%. Furthermore, under Rousseff's predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who came to power for the first time in 2003, the country made great strides in the alleviation of poverty, lifting over 35 million Brazilians out of poverty and increasing in the number of students attending university by 3.5 million. Since then, the economy has slowed in line with a broader deceleration in former high-growth countries such as China, India and Russia.

The dramatic cost of the World Cup, in conjunction with a number of corruption scandals surrounding the awarding of construction contracts, has damaged the public image of the current government, despite hard campaigning by the Rousseff administration to overcome the perception of a mismanagement of the World Cup and a neglect of funding for essential services. As such, the impact of the World Cup on Rousseff's approval rating will depend to a large extent on her capacity to convince the population of the benefits of the tournament for the country's economy. Further strikes are expected across the country on an almost daily basis, with a number of movements announcing that they will stage public protests on 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26 and 30 June and 5 and 12 July across various cities. Nevertheless, the possibility of a much-feared replication of the summer 2013 protests appears remote due to a much increased military and police presence.

Other developments

On 14-15 June, the G77 gathered in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding in 1964. The intergovernmental organisation, which includes 133 states from the Americas, Africa and Asia and Oceania, was established to promote the economic interests of developing countries. The summit was inaugurated by Bolivian President Evo Morales and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and was centred on the 2015 UN millennium goals. The goals contain eight development targets to tackle poverty that were established at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. In addition, the G77 declared its support for an internal resolution to the current political crisis in Venezuela, and criticised the United States for 'meddling' in the region.

A series of student protests were staged across several cities in Chile on 10 June. Organised by the Confederation of Chilean Students (CONFECH), the marches attracted several thousand people, most notably in the capital, Santiago. Several clashes with the security forces were reported. The marches represented the second round of student protests organised by CONFECH since Chilean President Michelle Bachelet took office promising the provision of better and free education funded by a rise in taxes. The student union criticises the president for not going far enough with her proposed education reforms, which they perceive as superficial. In response, Bachelet has tried to reassure the students that more ambitious reforms are currently being arranged. Students demand the elimination of school fees, the end of profit-making universities, and a reduction in the high cost of college education.

Tensions mount as Argentina criticises Uruguay for failing to comply with an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling over a pulp mill dispute. On 13 June, the Argentine foreign minister, Héctor Timerman, threatened his Uruguayan counterpart with an appeal to the ICJ. According to Timerman, Uruguay has failed to comply with a 2010 ICJ ruling that set a clear limit to the production capacity of its pulp mill on the Río de la Plata, a river that is shared by both countries. In 2006, the construction of the pulp mill engendered a diplomatic and economic conflict between countries that was subsequently resolved by the 2010 ICJ ruling that limited the factory's production capacity and established a bilateral surveillance commission.

On the radar

- **The heads of state of Mexico, Peru, Colombia and Chile will meet in Mexico on 19-20 June** at the ninth summit of the Pacific Alliance.
- **US Supreme Court will announce its capacity to rule upon the Argentine defaulted bonds case this week.**
- **FARC expected to continue ceasefire until 30 June**, during Colombia's presidential election campaigns.
- **Fifth BRICS summit to take place in Fortaleza, Brazil**, on 15 July.
- **Further clashes between local residents and security forces are likely in Capácuaro, Mexico.**

Asia and the Pacific

Malaysian coast guard hunts pirates following string of oil tanker hijackings in Straits of Malacca

A major search for a group of pirates has been launched following at least five separate hijackings in the Straits of Malacca in recent weeks. The search for a group of 10 machete-wielding pirates began on 9 June following a raid on a 60-metre long oil barge off the coast of Bintulu in Sarawak state, Malaysian Borneo. The pirates reportedly tied up the vessel's 22 crew members, siphoned over a million litres of oil, and robbed the ship of its communication equipment and other valuables. The tanker is currently being held by authorities at Labuan Port. The Malaysian penal code states that acts of piracy, classified as gang robbery in Malaysia, are subject to 20 years in prison and whipping. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (the Malaysian coast guard) is leading the investigation.

In April 2014, pirates attacked a Thai diesel tanker off the coast of eastern Malaysia, resulting in the injury of the vessel's captain. In the same month, a Singaporean tanker was raided in the Strait of Malacca, resulting in the kidnap of three Indonesian crew members and the theft of in excess of three million litres of diesel. Although the frequency of attacks has decreased in recent years as a result of increased patrols and international anti-piracy cooperation, attacks on oil tankers are still common in this region.

The Strait of Malacca has historically been a hotbed for piracy, as it is a vital maritime shipping route connecting Europe and the Middle East with Asia. It is the shortest transport route for suppliers in the Persian Gulf seeking to capitalise upon booming Asian energy demands. Approximately 40% of all global trade utilises this naval transport route, the vast majority of which is attributable to petroleum. Among the three countries that border the Strait of Malacca, Singapore has traditionally favoured international assistance in maritime security, while Indonesia and Malaysia have resisted such assistance, creating a notable element of political tension. In 2006, the Indian Navy and Coast Guard began participating in antipiracy patrols in the region, leading to a significant decrease in the number of attacks; however, as recent events have illustrated, piracy remains a significant concern in the Strait of Malacca.

Other developments

The Chinese Ministry of National Defence released video footage of Japanese F-15s tailing Chinese aircraft above the East China Sea. Chinese Ministry of National Defence spokesman Geng Yansheng accused the Japanese aircraft of illegally entering the Chinese East China Sea Air Defence Identification Zone. Japan does not recognise this zone, which was established unilaterally by China. The video reportedly depicted Japanese aircraft carrying missiles, and was described by Yansheng as 'obviously provocative'. On 24 May, Japan alleged that Chinese aircrafts had approached their planes in a similar manner. China rebuffed these claims, arguing that Japan was interfering with a Sino-Russian joint naval exercise. Chinese officials also reported that on 11 June an OP-3C surveillance aircraft and a YS-11EB intelligence aircraft conducted reconnaissance in China's Air Defence Identification Zone.

Several hundred demonstrators gathered on 12 June in the Filipino capital, Manila, to protest against Chinese territorial expansion. Protestors, consisting primarily of Filipino citizens and Vietnamese expatriots, gathered outside the Chinese consular office. Earlier this month, China engaged in 'earth-moving' activities on Mabini Reef and elsewhere near the Spratly Islands. These actions were seen by the Philippines as reclamation of contested territory currently being reviewed by an international tribunal. China has refused to participate in any international mediation of territorial disputes. These protests in Manila resonate with protests in Vietnam last month, which turned violent, leading to the deaths of at least two Chinese citizens and significant property damage. As China continues to engage in what neighbouring states view as reclamation of disputed territory, the likelihood that domestic opposition in the Philippines, Vietnam and elsewhere will escalate to violence continues to rise.

A delegation from Thailand's military junta began meetings with Chinese military officials on 11 June.

On 22 May, Thailand's military seized power from the Pheu Thai Party, formerly led by Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Historically, Thailand has proven to be a reliable ally of the United States. Nevertheless, US officials have expressed opposition to the military rule in Thailand. At a meeting in Yangon, Myanmar, Thailand's secretary of the foreign ministry met with US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Representatives from Russia, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, India, South Korea and China were also present at the meeting, held to prepare for this year's East Asian Summit. Last week, Thai General Prayth Chan-ocha convened a meeting with a group of Chinese business leaders. Vietnam's ambassador has also met with coup leaders and declared recognition of the junta's rule. As the military seeks to strengthen its domestic legitimacy, having cancelled and delayed national elections for at least 15 months, it is evidently now attempting to deepen its regional and international legitimacy.

On the radar

- **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to unveil a series of economic policy proposals** on or around 27 June.
- **Further unrest is likely in the Mirpur area of Dhaka, Bangladesh**, following recent clashes between members of the Jubo League and residents of Kalshi camp.
- **Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou will visit Panama and El Salvador** beginning 29 June.
- **Malaysia's defence minister will visit representatives of the military junta in Thailand this week.**
- **Following a controversial visit to China, the Sao Tome and Principe's president will lead a delegation to Taiwan.**

Europe

Attacks between military forces and rebels intensify in Ukraine

On 13 June, the Ukrainian government announced that their forces had reclaimed Mariupol, a port city in the Donetsk region, after a six-hour offensive that resulted in the deaths of five rebels. Fighting intensified on 14 June with the launch of airstrikes by the Ukrainian Air Force against pro-Russian strongholds, while ground forces conducted operations in Luhansk. The military retaliated after separatists shot down an Ilyushin-76 aircraft with Igla handheld surface-to-air missiles and a heavy calibre machine gun during landing, killing 49 personnel. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called the attack terrorism.

Last week, Kiev gained the upper hand against the rebels in the anti-separatist offensive that was launched in April. The taking back of Mariupol is a significant victory for the pro-European Ukrainian government, as the city is located on major roads that link Ukraine's southeastern border with Russia and the country's other regions. The city is also important for its port, from which Ukraine exports steel, one of the country most significant commodities. Ukrainian military also regained control of a 120 kilometre stretch of the border between Russia and Ukraine; however, local media speculate that parts of the remaining 2,000 kilometre border are still under the control of pro-Russian separatists.

Russia backed calls by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for an immediate ceasefire and engaged dialogue between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists. However, the perception of a notable change in the Russian position towards the political crisis in Ukraine was nullified following a report from Kiev on 12 June suggesting that Russian military vehicles, including three tanks, had crossed the border into Ukraine. On 14 June, NATO released satellite images that appear to corroborate this assertion, and it is likely that such instances will increase as Kiev brings further regions of eastern Ukraine back under governmental control. G7 countries will likely respond to any continued Russian complicity in separatist activities by imposing targeted sectorial sanctions upon Russia, as outlined during the Brussels summit on 4-5 June.

Other developments

A small homemade bomb exploded outside the offices of the ruling Democratic Party (PD) in Florence, Italy, on 10 June. The facade of the building and windows were damaged, but there were no injuries. Local authorities have revealed that the device consisted of a plastic container containing three gas cans dipped in flammable liquid. The attack came days after the victory of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party at the European elections, winning 40.8% of the vote. As Renzi rose to power in February through a political arrangement rather than by popular vote, his party's success in the European elections has been viewed as a validation of Renzi's leadership. However, this success has been overshadowed by a series of recent corruption scandals.

On 9 June, a court in Moscow sentenced two men to life in prison for the murder of Russian investigative journalist, Anna Politkovskaya. The judge agreed to the prosecutor's request that Rustam Makhmudov be given a life sentence after being found guilty of shooting the journalist in 2006. Makhmudov's uncle Lom-Ali Gaitukayev was also sentenced to life in prison for organising the killing. Another three men were given sentences of up to 20 years in prison. Politkovskaya, an outspoken critic of the Putin administration, was shot in the elevator of her Moscow apartment block. Her murder provoked an international outcry over the safety of journalists in Russia and the risks faced by those who criticise the Putin government. Concerns were also raised regarding the transparency and fairness of the Russian justice system, after the suspects were acquitted in 2009; however, the Russian Supreme Court later ordered a retrial.

On 9 June, Bulgarian Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski announced that the government would suspend work on South Stream pipeline for the foreseeable future. Oresharski also announced that the future construction would be contingent on consultations with the European Commission. The news came after a visit to Bulgaria by three US Senators: John McCain, Ron Johnson and Christopher Murphy. During the visit, McCain remarked that the United States would prefer less Russian involvement in issues concerning the South Stream. The Russian gas company Gazprom initiated the project in October 2013. The pipelines were due to transport Russian gas to Southern and Central Europe via the Black Sea to Bulgaria – thus, bypassing the traditional pipelines in Ukraine.

On the radar

- **European Union agriculture ministers to meet with US agriculture ministers to discuss expanding trade opportunities.**
- **French rail strike likely to continue this week.**
- **Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen to step down on 16 June.** Alexandrt Stubb, the current Finnish Europe minister, is expected to succeed him.
- **Russia expected to cut the gas supply to the Ukraine this week.**
- **Potential risk of opposition protests in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, on 26 June,** during Armed Forces Day.

Middle East

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant seizes large parts of Nineveh province and pushes further south towards Baghdad

Militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), captured Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, on 10 June, and by 12 June had also seized Tikrit. Heavy fighting between ISIL rebels and Iraqi troops also broke out around the towns of Baiji, Kirkuk and Samarra, just 68 miles north of Baghdad. Rebels in Mosul stormed the Turkish consulate and seized 25 staff, including the head of the country's diplomatic mission. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that some 500,000 people have fled the city of Mosul since the militant takeover. Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga fighters took control of military installations in the major oil-producing city of Kirkuk following the abandonment of many of the facilities by the central government's forces. ISIL now control swathes of northern Iraq, following advances in Fallujah, Ramadi, parts of Anbar province and northern Syria over the past year.

ISIL have controlled areas of Anbar province and the city of Fallujah since February this year. Under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group has established itself as an ideological alternative to al-Qaeda and has become increasingly transnational. Originally an Iraqi affiliate of al-Qaeda, the group has expanded its operations into Syria as the civil war worsened and rival rebel factions began to fight among themselves. If the group is able to hold on to Mosul and much of Nineveh province, it will be able to link up with territory it controls in neighbouring Anbar province and Syria – moving funds, weapons and fighters between the various battlefronts. ISIL have exploited popular anti-Shia government sentiment in the north of the country to their advantage, and their presence in Sunni areas will likely provide them with further opportunity for recruitment.

Widespread damage and civilian casualties are highly likely if the Iraqi government responds to the seizure of Mosul in the same way as it has in other cities.. Bagdad, in particular, has been plagued by a long-running bombing campaign designed to polarise the Sunni and Shia communities. Should ISIL manage to launch a more conventional attack on high profile Shia interests in the south of Iraq, a retaliatory Shia uprising would be highly likely. The success of the operation will likely encourage advances elsewhere in the country and embolden others to carry out attacks; however, is unlikely that ISIL currently has the capacity to gain and subsequently hold control of the oil-rich Kurdish region or Baghdad.

Other developments

Karachi airport came under attack on 10 June, less than two days after militants lay siege to the facility. Gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on Jinnah International Airport's security force academy (ASF), though no casualties were reported. Flights in and out of the airport were subsequently grounded following that attack. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the earlier attack that left some 36 people dead, including 10 of the gunmen. The attack was carried out in revenge for drone strikes, and serves to highlight the difficulties facing the Pakistani security forces. Attacks on infrastructure in the short term are very likely.

In the week following the swearing in of former army chief Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, the Egyptian military took control of al-Arish port in the Sinai Peninsula on 9 June. Control of the port was transferred from a civilian-run agency to the military due to security concerns in Sinai, where militant activities have increased in recent years. The decision underscores concerns that the country may once again be dominated by a military presence in both the economic and political spheres.

A car bomb in the Syrian city of Homs killed at least seven people and injured 25 others on 12 June. The blast occurred in the pro-government district of Wadi Dahab. Last month, the Syrian government took control of the central Syrian city as part of a negotiated evacuation and amnesty following two years of rebel occupation. However, anti-government rebels still have control of the surrounding areas, with car bombs occasionally targeting government areas. Government-controlled areas of Damascus and Homs also remain at risk of attack.

On the radar

- **Newly-elected Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi will visit Saudi Arabia this week** to thank the Kingdom for its support.
- **Preliminary results from the second round run-off in Afghanistan's presidential election will indicate President Hamid Karzai's successor on 2 July.**
- **Washington is expected to announce its military stance on the advance of ISIL in Iraq**, with the possibility of airstrikes on rebel targets.
- **14 July marks Republic Day in Iraq.**
- **Pro- and anti-government protests possible in Egypt** on Revolution Day on 23 July.

Polar Regions

Meeting of Russian foreign minister and Finnish president fuels debate on NATO membership

Finnish President Sauli Niinistö met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the president's summer residence, Kultaranta, on 10 June. The meeting focused firstly on the crisis in Ukraine, with a frank interchange of views on how the security dilemma can be resolved. In a closely related discussion, Niinistö and Lavrov debated the future of Finnish and Russian relations, including the former's role as an arbiter between the EU and Russia and, most crucially for security concerns on both sides of the border, its potential accession to NATO. The question of NATO membership follows stark warnings from Moscow over the likely political fallout from such a decision, with one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's closet aides, Sergei Markov, branding Finland 'Russophobic' and the call for NATO membership as a step 'on the road to World War III'.

Arguably, Russia's wariness of a potential Finnish accession to NATO is well justified. As has been often repeated in the Russian press, were Finland to become a member of NATO, the alliance's borders with Russia would double. This would undoubtedly lead to Russia positioning greater troop numbers along its western borders, further increasing already tense relations not only with NATO but also along a number of related dimensions already fraught with suspicion and misunderstanding, such as Russian relations with Finland, the Baltic States and the EU. On the other hand, there are those in Finland, particularly within its military establishment, who argue that Russia's allegedly legitimate concerns amount to nothing more than intimidation. According to this view, NATO membership for Finland is a necessary counter to Russia's increasingly belligerent stance not only in Ukraine, but also in the Baltic; Moscow has reopened a number of military bases close to the Finnish border, and flew numerous bombing simulations last year over Finland and Sweden. NATO membership would afford Finland protection under Article 5 of the organisation's charter, which specifies that an attack on one alliance member is an attack on all.

Both Finland and Sweden are faced by a security paradox in which increasing Russian belligerence makes NATO accession simultaneously more desirable and more risky. Sweden, which has no shared border with Russia, far less economic interdependence, a long history of close cooperation with NATO, and a hawkish critic of Russian policy in its foreign minister, Carl Bildt, seems more likely to opt for NATO membership. There has been lively debate within the Swedish defence establishment as to whether to join, but many analysts argue that a bid in NATO's upcoming September summit is unlikely, as the existence of popular support for NATO membership among the wider Swedish population is highly questionable. Such a lack of popular support is even more pronounced in Finland, where only one in five support membership. This fact, combined with the knowledge that Russia has far more economic and political leverage over Finland than its other Nordic neighbours, explains the timid press release issued by the president's office after the meeting with Lavrov, which did not once mention NATO. This press release contrasts starkly with Lavrov's many interviews with the Russian press following the meeting, in which he claimed triumphantly to have 'secured Finland from NATO membership'. Nevertheless, a significant portion of Finland's defence establishment still supports membership, a view shared by Alexander Stubb, the man most likely to become Finland's next prime minister. Assuming the invitation remains open, Finnish accession to NATO thus remains a distant possibility.

Other developments

The Greenpeace vessel Esperanza was used in a 12 June protest in Ølen in western Norway, where ExxonMobil is readying the West Alpha oil rig for a joint drilling project with Rosneft in the Kara Sea later this summer. The Greenpeace protestors on board the ship held signs demanding ExxonMobil withdraw from Arctic exploration. In a simultaneous protest held at the Bislett Stadium in Oslo, activists unfurled a large banner with the message 'No Arctic Oil'. ExxonMobil is a main sponsor of the Bislett Games, an annual international sporting event held in the stadium. ExxonMobil has several areas of exploration interest in the Russian Arctic. A 2011 strategic cooperation agreement with Rosneft opened up a 125,000 square kilometre area in the Kara Sea for joint exploration between the energy majors, and ExxonMobil also has interests in the Arctic Sakhalin-1 project.

Fire struck a Lukoil field near Usinsk, Russia, on 10 June, the company's second industrial accident in the last month. Fire fighters succeeded in quickly putting out the blaze. In May, they struggled with a more serious situation when four reservoirs with a total of 20,000 tonnes of oil caught fire, with the operation taking more than two days to complete. Usinsk, near the Arctic Circle in Russia's Komi Republic, has been the site of numerous oil spills and fires in recent history, most dramatically in a spill in 1994 that saw as much as 200,000 tonnes of oil spill into the tundra.

Russia's newest strategic nuclear-powered submarine, Vladimir Monomakh, has begun sea trials in the White Sea. The Vladimir Monomakh is the third submarine to be completed out of a total of eight vessels that are to be completed by 2020 in order to modernise the delivery of Russia's nuclear deterrent. The trials began on 11 June, and are expected to last about two weeks. In July or August, the submarine will launch two Bulava intercontinental missiles in a test launch.

On the radar

- **The Our Ocean conference will take place on 16-17 June in Washington DC, United States.** Arctic environmental and energy issues will be high up on the agenda in a conference bringing together political, business, environmental and science leaders.

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